

Blog Post

Navigating Uncertainty: How U.S. Employers Can Support Their Employees During Times of War

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By [Ayelén R. Rodriguez](#)

In periods of global conflict, the effects of war often extend well beyond the battlefield. Employees may be called to military service, support deployed family members, worry about loved ones abroad, or simply feel the emotional strain of ongoing uncertainty. For U.S. employers, these moments can raise not only operational and legal issues, but also questions of leadership, communication, and workplace culture. Supporting employees during times of war requires both practical awareness and empathy. Employers that understand the issues most likely to arise and respond thoughtfully will be better positioned to support their workforce while maintaining compliance and stability.

[Leave Rights for Employees Directly Affected by War](#)

Military Leave

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) provides important protections for employees called to active military duty. Under USERRA, eligible employees may be entitled to:

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- **Job Protection:** Employees returning from military service generally must be reinstated to their prior position or an equivalent one.
- **Benefits Continuation:** In some circumstances, health insurance coverage may continue during military leave for an extended period.
- **Non-Discrimination:** Employers may not take adverse action against employees because of military service.

Employers should ensure these requests are handled consistently, with clear policies and appropriate notices and by personnel who understand how military leave obligations operate in practice.

Family and Medical Leave

Leave rights may extend to employees caring for or supporting family members affected by military services under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). These protections may include:

- **Qualifying Exigency Leave:** Eligible employees may take leave for certain urgent needs arising from a family member's military deployment.
- **Military Caregiver Leave:** Eligible employees may take extended leave to care for a covered service member with a serious injury or illness.

Because these requests can involve specific notice and documentation requirements, employers should administer them carefully and consistently.

State Law Considerations

Federal law is not always the full picture. Many states provide additional protections or benefits for employees affected by military service or related obligations. These may include extended or broader leave, pay differentials, or job protections than those available under federal law. For example, in New York, New York Military Law provides leave rights

for employees performing ordered military duty, including travel to and from that duty. It also protects continuity of employment and preserves certain employment rights during the leave period, provided the employee timely seeks reinstatement upon return. Employers are encouraged to review state-specific statutes and consult legal counsel as needed.

Remote Work and Flexible Arrangements

Not every wartime workplace issue arrives as a formal leave request. During times of conflict, employees in high-risk locations, whether domestic or international, or employees with close family or personal ties to affected regions, may need temporary alternative work arrangements.

Employers may be able to support these employees by:

- offering remote work or flexible hours;
- considering temporary relocation options;
- addressing security, technology, and communication needs; and
- ensuring wage and hour compliance in all relevant jurisdictions.

These arrangements work best when employers communicate clearly about expectations, timing, reporting lines, and operational needs.

Mental Health and Employee Assistance

The effects of war are not always visible, but they can be significant. Conflict and uncertainty may affect employees' focus, stress levels, morale, and overall well-being.

Employers may wish to:

- promote employee assistance programs (EAPs) and mental health resources;

- train managers to recognize signs of distress and respond appropriately; and
- foster a supportive environment in which employees feel comfortable seeking help.

Even a measured acknowledgment from leadership, along with a reminder about available support, can help employees feel seen and supported.

Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Protections

Periods of war can heighten workplace tension and increase the risk of bias, inappropriate comments, or harassment, particularly when employees are perceived to be associated with a conflict because of their national origin, religion, ethnicity, or background. Employers should remain vigilant and respond promptly when concerns arise.

Practical steps may include:

- reinforcing anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies;
- providing training on respectful workplace expectations, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity; and
- promptly investigating and addressing any complaints or incidents.

This is also a good time to remind managers that comments about world events can have real workplace consequences if left unaddressed.

Communication and Policy Updates

During times of crisis, employees often look to leadership for clarity and reassurance. Practical, transparent, and compassionate communication can reduce confusion and help maintain trust.

Employers should consider:

- regularly updating employees on available resources and policy changes;
- reviewing and revising policies related to leave, remote work, and anti-discrimination as needed; and
- providing FAQs or resource guides to address common questions.

This is also a useful opportunity to test whether existing policies are workable in practice, not just sufficient on paper.

When Stability Matters Most

Supporting employees during times of war or conflict is not only a legal responsibility, it is also an opportunity for employers to demonstrate steadiness, empathy, and sound judgment. By staying informed, updating policies where needed, and leading with care, employers can better navigate uncertainty more effectively while supporting their people. When employers prioritize both compliance and care, they are better positioned to foster a resilient workplace where employees feel valued and supported, even in the most challenging times. For assistance in navigating federal, state, or workplace policy considerations, please contact Akerman's Labor and Employment Practice Group.

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